

# SOUTH FLORIDA Sun Sentinel

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Low: 72  
Forecast: 14B

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## Democratic Party icon under fire

For Debbie Wasserman Schultz, dream job as leader turned into a relentless nightmare

By ANTHONY MAN  
Staff writer

Congresswoman Debbie Wasserman Schultz's time leading the Democratic National Committee is looking less like the opportunity of a lifetime—and more like an albatross.  
■ She's been cast as a central villain in a new book, in which her successor as party chairwoman, Donna Brazile, attempts to shift much of the blame for Democratic election losses to others.  
■ She was questioned this year about party funding of opposition research about Donald Trump that ended up in a

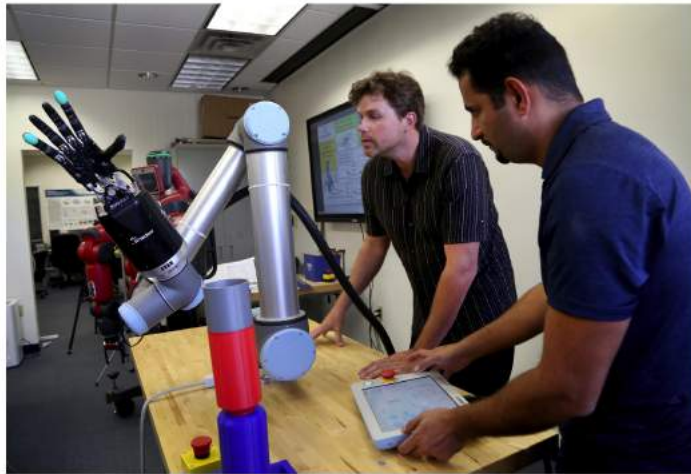
controversial dossier claiming ties between the Republican presidential candidate and Russia. She told the Senate Intelligence Committee staff that she knew nothing about DNC funding for the dossier.  
■ On the eve of the party's 2016 presidential convention, she was forced to resign from the post after hacked emails revealed party staffers had favored Hillary Clinton over Bernie Sanders during the primaries.  
■ Political opponents from the left and right continue to use her time at the national party as fodder for their attempts to oust her from the from the

congressional seat she first won in 2004.  
"She would have been better off not taking that position," said Marty Ireland, a longtime Democratic Party activist. Ireland is a Wasserman Schultz loyalist — "she's my congresswoman and I believe in her" — but said the long-lasting political hangover is painful to watch.  
When President Barack Obama picked the Broward/Miami-Dade County congresswoman to take over the party, it seemed like it might be a stepping stone that could lead to higher



AMY BETH BENNETT/STAFF FILE  
U.S. Rep. Debbie Wasserman Schultz has critics in both parties, though others say she's a scapegoat.

See PARTY, 10A



SUSAN STOCKER/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER  
Erik Engeberg, an FAU associate professor of mechanical engineering, and his student Moaed Abd test a robotic prosthetic hand.

## PROSTHETICS WITH A SENSE OF TOUCH

FAU researchers use mouse cells to develop artificial limbs with ability to feel

By LOIS K. SOLOMON  
Staff writer

It sounds like an idea from the 22nd century: A robotic hand for amputees, with its own nervous system grown from mouse cells.  
But Florida Atlantic University engineers are developing these computerized prostheses right now in a lab in Boca Raton.  
"We are working on how to convey an improved sense of touch," said Erik Engeberg,

the FAU researcher leading the project. "The goal is to give back to amputees fine movements and dexterity and convey to them different kinds of temperature and touch sensations, such as a light touch, a fast touch and a vibrational touch."  
The research project, fueled by a \$1.3 million grant from the National Institutes of Health, is also working to restore the sensation of pres-

See ROBOT, 10A

## Player's 28 rejections, no defeat

Talk about a lesson in perseverance: St. Thomas Aquinas graduate (and former substitute teacher) Michael Palardy will face off against the Miami Dolphins tonight as a Carolina Panther — after trying out for 28 teams. Dave Hyde column and full coverage, 1C and 5C

## Ex-intel chiefs blast Trump

By LAURA KING  
Washington Bureau

WASHINGTON — Two former senior intelligence officials Sunday offered an extraordinary critique of President Trump's mode of dealing with foreign leaders, portraying the president as cowed by Russia's Vladimir Putin and overly susceptible to flattery by rivals likely seeking to manipulate him.  
The broadsides by ex-CIA Director John Brennan and former director of national intelligence James Clapper followed months of tension between the White House and the intelligence community over the president's reluctance to publicly accept intelligence assessments that Russia sought to sway the

See TRUMP, 10A

### YOUR NATION, YOUR WORLD

#### Kelly: I know nothing of Trump tweets

President tweeted that Kim Jong Un is "short and fat." Chief of staff tells aides to ignore the messages. **3A**

#### Judge approved; has never tried a case

Lawyer and blogger approved as federal judge by Senate panel. Bar Association rated him "unqualified." **8A**

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# Visiting neighbors just isn't our thing any more

By Christopher Ingraham  
The Washington Post

In 2016, the share of Americans who say they "never" socialize with their neighbors hit an all-time high of 34 percent, according to the General Social Survey. That number's been rising steadily since 1974, when just 21 percent said they never hang out with their neighbors.

The communities we

choose to live in play a significant role in how much we interact with our neighbors. You might expect that densely populated cities foster neighborly friendships, but in fact those living in cities are the most likely to avoid spending time with their neighbors completely, while those in small towns and rural areas are the least likely.

We often think of cities as fertile grounds for social interactions between neigh-

waning in small towns just as much as it is in big cities.

There are a lot of different factors driving this trend, as outlined in a 2015 City Observatory report. We spend more time indoors, watching TV. The wealthy have walled themselves off in gated communities. "Space and experience become more private, fueled by suburban expansion, large lots, and the predominance of single-family homes," the City

Observatory's authors write.

Trust is declining, too. The General Social Survey's data show that the share of Americans saying most people can be trusted has fallen from nearly 50 percent in the 1970s to just over 30 percent today.

That lack of trust extends to our neighbors: In 2016 nearly half of Americans told the Pew Research Center that they trust only "some" or "none" of their

neighbors. Mirroring the numbers on social interactions above, the survey found that people in rural areas were most trusting of their neighbors, while those in urban areas trusted their neighbors the least.

These trends may be self-reinforcing: we trust our neighbors less because we're interacting less frequently with them, and we're interacting less frequently with them because we trust them less.

## TRUMP

Continued from Page 1A

2016 vote in his favor.

That long-running contempt flared again over the weekend when Trump, speaking to reporters aboard Air Force One as he traveled in Asia, implied that he took Russian President Vladimir Putin at his word that Russia had not acted to influence the U.S. election. Trump also said that raising the issue was insulting to Putin.

On Sunday, in Hanoi, Trump partially walked back those remarks, telling reporters that "I'm not afraid of what he can do, or what might come out as a result of these investigations," Brennan said, apparently referring to the arranging probe being carried out by special counsel Robert S. Mueller III and several separate congressional investigations.

Brennan, appearing on CNN's "State of the Union," said the president's stance, even somewhat softened, was incompatible with established facts.

"It's very clear that the Russians interfered in the election, and it's still puzzling as to why Mr. Trump does not acknowledge that and embrace it and also push back hard against Mr.

Putin," he said.

Trump, he said, should state "very clearly and strongly that this is a national security problem, and to say to Mr. Putin, 'We know you, and you have to stop it, because there are going to be consequences if you don't.'"

Brennan was unusually explicit in suggesting that the Russian leader had some sort of hold over Trump — a theory often voiced by Democratic political figures, but one that intelligence veterans generally avoid.

"I think Mr. Trump is, for whatever reason, either intimidated by Mr. Putin or afraid of what he can do, or what might come out as a result of these investigations," Brennan said, apparently referring to the arranging probe being carried out by special counsel Robert S. Mueller III and several separate congressional investigations.

Characterizing Trump's dealings with Russia as colored by "naivete, ignorance or fear," the former CIA chief said the tenor of Trump's encounters with Putin — the latest of which came during his Asia trip — fueled the belief, especially among authoritarian or universal leaders, that it was easy to take advantage of the U.S. president.



SAUL LOEB/GETTY-APP 2013

John Brennan, left, and James Clapper on Sunday criticized the president's dealings with his foreign counterparts.

"I think it demonstrates to Mr. Putin that Donald Trump can be played by foreign leaders who are going to appeal to his ego and try to play upon his insecurities, which is very, very worrisome from a national security standpoint," Brennan said.

Clapper, also appearing on CNN, said Trump's reluctance to fully acknowledge Kremlin interference was both puzzling and dangerous.

"I don't know why the ambiguity about this, because the threat posed by Russia is manifest, and obviously has been for a long

time," he said. "To try to point it in any other way, I think, astounding, and in fact poses a peril to this country."

Clapper concurred with Brennan's view that Trump "seems very susceptible to rolling out the red carpet and honor guards and all the trappings and pomp and circumstance" afforded by overseas visits.

"I think that appeals to him, and I think it plays to his insecurities," said Clapper.

The former intelligence chiefs' comments drew a sharp response from Treasury Secretary Steven

Mnuchin, also interviewed on CNN. He said Trump was "not getting played by anybody" and that it was "ridiculous" to suggest he was being manipulated by Putin or anyone else.

Mueller's investigation, which Trump again over the weekend decried as being based on a Democratic bias, has far led to the indictment of Trump's former campaign manager, Paul Manafort, and another aide, along with a guilty plea from a junior Trump campaign associate who is apparently cooperating with investigators. More indictments are expected.

Following another of Trump's often-used talking points, Short stressed the benefits of a cooperative relationship with Putin on security matters.

"I think the president is more interested in figuring out how can we partner with them to help prevent North Korea from developing nuclear weapons," he said.

Trump on Sunday repeated that a good working relationship with Putin could pay big dividends.

"Having Russia in a friendly posture, as opposed to always fighting with them, makes sense to the world and an asset to our country, not a liability," he told reporters in Vietnam.

## PARTY

Continued from Page 1A

office or a spot in congressional leadership. Wasserman Schultz was a constant presence on television and traveled the country advocating for her president and party.

In hindsight, said Blake MacDiarmid, a South Florida Republican strategist, serving as party chairwoman from May 2011 until July 2016 didn't help Wasserman Schultz.

"Looking at the facts now and the record, she probably would have had a much longer career in politics had she not been the DNC chair," he said. "You pick up a lot of negatives being a party leader."

### Brazile book

The newest controversy stems from Brazile's book, "Hacks: The Inside Story of the Break-ins and Breakdowns That Put Donald Trump in the White House," published last week. It contains dozens of references — seven in just the first two pages — to "Debbie."

Brazile heaps much of the blame for the party's declining fortunes during the Obama years — losses at the congressional level, in governor's offices and state legislatures — on Wasserman Schultz.

Describing the mood as the party convention began in July 2016, when Wasserman Schultz had resigned and with Brazile about to replace her, she wrote that "it pained me to hear her critics talk about her behind her back. I was even more pained when I joined in that chorus."

Brazile then went on to assert that Wasserman Schultz was a bad manager, had few friends and was hated by some, and didn't consult

with other Democrats. "She seemed to make decisions on her own and let us know at the last minute what she had decided," Brazile said, adding that Wasserman Schultz had "outsourced a lot of the management of the party and had not been the greatest at fundraising."

The author said Wasserman Schultz "liked the power and perks of being a chair but not the responsibilities."

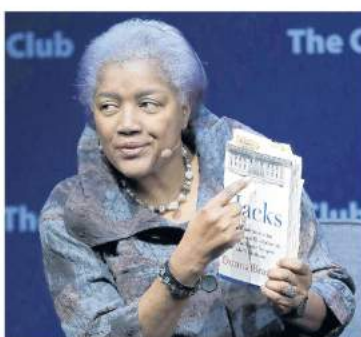
Brazile scorned what she labeled perks provided to Wasserman Schultz: a sport-utility vehicle and driver, a chief of staff and an assistant, and a body woman, a staffer assigned to accompany the party chairwoman out of the office on party business to carry personal effects and do things like take notes and collect contact information. And she wrote critically of "Debbie's big office" at DNC headquarters — including the "Florida pink" Wasserman Schultz had chosen for the walls.

### Reaction and response

Friends and foes of Wasserman Schultz have suggested Brazile's book was written and marketed in a way to maximize attention and sales — and not necessarily to provide an full account of reality.

"Everybody who writes a book likes to make a profit," said Mitch Cessar, former chairman of the Broward Democratic Party who spent 10 years representing 13 southern states on the Democratic National Committee's executive board.

Ben Pollara, a South Florida Democratic political strategist who has often been critical of Wasserman Schultz, said his understanding of Brazile's account is the "same old kind of re-tread on Debbie."



AP FILE

Former Democratic National Committee chairwoman Donna Brazile's book details the hacking of the DNC during the presidential campaign.

Pollara said he has no interest in buying or reading the book, which also criticizes the Clinton campaign. "She's trying to sell books," he said. "She's trafficking in gossip that I think is not only not representative of the facts but exploitative of the Clinton-Sanders rift that we really need to move on from."

Republican MacDiarmid isn't a fan of Wasserman Schultz, but he said the leader of a party with the president in the White House isn't an independent operator; the president's people call many of the shots.

"Wasserman Schultz made a lot of mistakes, but ultimately it's the person in the White House and the person at the top of the ticket that drives these wins and losses. She's an easy scapegoat," he said. "The congresswoman isn't talk-

ing about the book. During a news conference this week, Wasserman Schultz repeatedly avoided answering questions about it.

"I am focused on doing the best job that I can to represent my constituents here in Florida's 23rd Congressional District," she said. "My focus, which is what my constituents elected me to do, is to make sure that I can fight for the things they care about."

Party activist Ireland said he wishes Wasserman Schultz would "fight back a little bit" but understands why she isn't. "That's not Debbie's way of doing things."

### Political fallout

As Wasserman Schultz runs for an eighth term, challengers are using her DNC leadership as a

cudgel against her. Carlos Reyes, one of three Republicans seeking his party's nomination to challenge Wasserman Schultz next year, called her "the swamp queen" in a fundraising email citing the Brazile book and accusing her her of "dereliction of duty."

A fundraising pitch from Tim Canova, who challenged Wasserman Schultz in the 2016 Democratic congressional primary and is running again, said Brazile's book "rotted everything I have been saying for the past two years, that as long as Debbie Wasserman Schultz is in public life, the Democratic Party will continue its decline."

Pollara said continuing attention to the DNC would "absolutely not" have any effect on Wasserman Schultz's re-election in the Broward/Miami-Dade County district that is overwhelmingly Democratic.

If she was ever going to be vulnerable, he said, it would have been in last year's primary. Sanders supporters were angry at her and helped fuel the Canova primary challenge with volunteers and money. "Those Clinton/Sanders divisions were at as much of a fever pitch as they're ever going to be," he said.

And Wasserman Schultz won the 2016 primary with 57 percent of the vote and the general election, also with 57 percent of the vote.

Debbie Eisinger, who served from 2002 through 2012 as a commissioner and then mayor of Cooper City, said she is confident Wasserman Schultz will win re-election next year. Eisinger, a political ally of the congresswoman, said support for her is "very widespread."

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## ROBOT

Continued from Page 1A

sure the firmness of a grip, the feel of the weight of an object, and its quality of fragility or density.

Or as Engberg says, "feeling the difference between holding a ball and holding an egg."

Engberg and his team see the path to that restored sense of touch and grip through a robotic hand with its own nervous system consisting of dorsal root ganglia, or clusters of nerve cells, grown from mice. They plan to electrically stimulate the ganglia with sensors from the robotic hand and see how the

nerves rebuild, hoping the same will happen in the prostheses of hand amputees.

Engberg said it's a unique approach to the problem of loss of touch sensation.

Those who have lost a hand, about 600,000 people in the United States, face limited options as they search for a prosthesis. Only a small number of manufacturers have entered the market, and the \$25,000 cost is often not covered by insurance, said Karen Lundquist, spokeswoman for the nonprofit Amputee Coalition, based in Virginia.

Joshua Marcus, of Boca Raton, has experienced the

grueling quest for a properly fitting prosthesis.

Marcus, 31, an attorney who lost his left arm above the elbow in a boating accident in 2008, said his five-pound prosthesis is too heavy to wear for his daily activities. He also can't get it to fit properly in its socket.

He said he hasn't worn it in three months, even though it cost about \$300,000.

"A hand that could sense touch and heat is really good, but it's not my first priority," Marcus said. "My number one concern is fit and making it comfortable."

Engberg, who has been working on similar mechanical engineering prob-

lems since 2006, said he looks forward to learning more about the issues faced by amputees such as Marcus, as well as the interaction of the mind and the body and how behavior collaborates with nerve regeneration to reestablish one of our most important senses.

He expects the project — being done by researchers, engineers, a brain scientist and an orthopedic surgeon — to take about four years, which is also the duration of the grant.

"This is such an engaging topic," Engberg said. "It's what gets me out of bed every morning."

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SUSAN STOCKER/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

FAU professor Erik Engberg and his BioRobotics Lab have received a \$1.3 million grant to develop the robotic hand.